

BETTY'S BOARER

Synopsis of Chapters Already Published

A young married woman, Betty Wharton, takes in as a boarder a man named Nelson, who is a total stranger to her. Her husband, Will Wharton, brings home \$1,000, which next morning is found to have disappeared, together with the boarder. Wharton takes his wife for ready acceptance of the stranger, but Betty refuses her suggestion of calling upon the police for help. He tells her to make the \$1,000 in the stock market, but refuses to say where he got the money for the investment. Betty is withholding the thief. That afternoon in attempting to cross a street she is knocked down by an automobile and upon coming to finds that she is in the motor car with Nelson himself beside her. Near an entrance to the park they come upon Wharton, who calls Betty's name. At her request Nelson restores the money to her, and afterward accompanies her to a police station, where Betty tells her story to the captain. Nelson offers no defense whatever. Betty returns to the car. Wharton, to her surprise, is furious when he learns that she has had Nelson arrested, and announces his intention of telephoning the captain to stop proceedings at once.

Betty indignantly leaves him and returns to the station house to see that the charge is pressed. The police captain, who is the reason why Betty is withholding the truth about his guilt, Nelson says that he expects Mrs. Wharton herself to prevent his going to jail. As he is speaking her voice is heard outside.

CHAPTER XXV.

BETTY ASKS ADVICE.

BETTY was quite out of breath when she entered the inner room at the station house. It was several minutes before she was able to explain the mission which brought her back. The captain remembered distinctly that nothing had been said by her about her coming again that day.

He had cautioned her not to fall in appearing against Nelson in court on the following morning, but that was all. She had asserted with considerable show of force and determination that she would be in hand. Not only that, but she added that her husband would accompany her.

Now here she stood, alone. Her breath came in short, nervous gasps. Nelson had just said that she would come, that he expected her. The mystery deepened.

The captain looked from one to the other, but he was unable to read any solution to the mystery in the expression of the two faces before him.

"Won't you be seated, Mrs. Wharton?" he said finally, as he placed a chair for Betty.

"Thank you," she managed to reply, when she had sufficiently recovered her breath.

"I was in such a hurry," she explained, "and it is so bitter cold outside that I—I—"

"That's all right, madam," said the captain. "Warm yourself a bit by the heater."

Betty, however, did not do as he suggested. Her mind was too full of her mission to bother long about how cold or how warm she was. She hadn't even glanced at Nelson.

The prisoner sat there waiting eagerly for her first words. There was a look of pleased anticipation on his face. It was evidently Betty's move and both men seemed well aware of that fact.

"I'm all right now," said Betty at last, as she looked up at the captain with a charming smile.

"I suppose," she added, "you are very much surprised to see me so soon again."

A faint blush crept up to the roots of her hair.

"Not at all," quickly replied the captain. "We were just speaking of you when you entered. As a matter of fact we were expecting you."

"You were expecting me?" repeated Betty, hardly able to believe what she heard. "Do you mean to say, captain, that you thought I would return?"

"Yes," answered the captain.

"I was expecting you," interposed Nelson in cool, even tones.

"It was the first time he had spoken to her, and she had not deigned to glance at him until that instant.

"You were expecting me?" repeated Betty. "How could you?"

"I knew when you left that you would be back very soon," said Nelson. "The only thing that surprised me was that you were so long in getting here."

"Oh, yes. I can vouch for what he says," added the captain. "He was looking for you. He told me so only the moment before you opened the door."

"I don't understand," said Betty, gazing from one to the other in undisguised wonderment.

"I knew you wouldn't fall me," remarked Nelson, with a provoking smile. "It isn't a question my falling or not falling you," said Betty. "That has nothing whatever to do with the case."

"But I knew your true woman nature would relent," continued Nelson in tones which refused to become excited.

"How dare you?" exclaimed Betty, in indignation.

"Whether or not a true woman or not cannot possibly interest you," she added, and with these words proceeded to ignore Nelson and gave her attention exclusively to the captain.

"Pardon me," persisted Nelson, nothing daunted by her withering look. "All I meant to say was that I was certain you would drop the charge against me."

"I had no doubt about that. I knew you must have been retained."

"Well, that's the most outrageous thing I ever heard of," cried Betty, looking steadily in the eyes.

"So you have returned to quash the charge, Mrs. Wharton?" interposed the captain.

Nelson smiled as he picked up his hat and coat and prepared to leave the room.

"I have no such intention," declared Betty, and she settled herself firmly back in her chair.

"You're joking, aren't you?" asked Nelson in a voice which refused to be disturbed.

"Not at all," Betty answered Betty.

"Then she addressed herself to the captain.

"Why this man should imagine for one moment that I should want to drop the charge against him is more than I can understand."

"But you've been home since you were here, haven't you?" asked Nelson.

"The question made Betty very indignant.

"Certainly, I've been home," she replied, speaking to the captain and answering Nelson's question without deigning to even glance in his direction. "I should like to know what my going home has to do with you, however," she added, as she turned the full gaze of her eyes on the prisoner. "Why should I change my mind about press-

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"He means that you had time to think it over," suggested the captain, not at all sure that his reason was a valid one. "A great many women are anxious to do a thing one moment and a half-hour later they are ready to do something else," he added by way of explanation.

"But I'm not that sort of woman," said Betty, firmly. "When I make up my mind to do a thing, anybody who knows me can tell you that I generally do it. That's the reason why I have come back this evening, captain, instead of tomorrow. It's because I'm not like other women that I'm here. I want you to advise me, captain. Something I feel that you are not unkindly disposed toward me."

"Indeed, I'm not, Mrs. Wharton," gallantly answered the captain. "I don't intend to conceal anything from you."

"That's right, Mrs. Wharton. Go right ahead."

In the meantime, Nelson had returned his hat and coat to the chair on which they had been lying. He sat down once more, leaned back in his chair and prepared to listen to Mrs. Wharton's story.

"He had been mistaken in the nature of the mission which brought her once more to the station house. However, he determined to make the best of an unpleasant situation."

"Do you wish to speak to me privately?" asked the captain, giving Betty a glance which, when interpreted, meant that he would send Nelson out if necessary.

"Oh, no," replied Betty. "I don't care whether he hears what I have to say or not. Perhaps it's just as well that he should hear, so that he can understand my position in this matter. He doesn't seem to realize my attitude."

"Very well, madam," replied the captain with a bow.

"When I left here," began Betty, "I promised to appear at court in the morning. And I meant what I said."

"Yes, yes," said the captain, who was very much surprised to see me so soon again."

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dering the stolen money; therefore it was as little as we could do to show our appreciation of the fact that he had given up the money. Mr. Wharton said that Nelson deserved to have the charge dropped, because he had been so kind in handing over what he had taken. He said that very few men would have done as Nelson did."

Betty spoke in perfect good faith. She did not know how weak Wharton's excuses sounded as they were repeated in the captain's office.

"A very exceptional man, your husband," remarked that official. "I should like to meet him. I would like to make a study of his characteristics."

The captain directed a long, steady glance at Nelson, but that gentleman took no notice of it. He sat where he could watch Betty's face, with its ever-varying expression.

"No sign from him as to the inward state of his feelings."

"By the way," continued the captain, "where is Mr. Wharton now? Is he waiting for you? Why didn't he come in with you?"

"That's just it," said Betty, in apparent confusion. "Mr. Wharton didn't come with me because we had a—"

Betty hesitated—"a falling out" about this charge," she finished.

"A 'falling out'?" repeated the captain.

"Yes. He told me that under no circumstances should I appear in court this morning. And I meant what I said."

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talk with the prisoner before we go any further in the matter."

"Well, here's your chance," said the captain in quick, decisive tones. "This is Charles Nelson. You can say all you want to."

Wharton hadn't bothered to wonder who the handsome man with the Gibson face was. He had merely glanced at him. But when the captain spoke his name he studied the bearer of it closely. Then he recognized the man whom he had seen in the park that afternoon in the big automobile. The picture of Nelson drying Betty's tears was still fresh in his mind.

While Wharton examined the prisoner feature by feature the Gibson man did not appear at all embarrassed. He took the scrutiny as a matter of course.

Betty and the captain watched the two as they eyed each other. There was no comparison. Wharton was thin, wiry, and he never seemed easy for any length of time. He was not strong in physique and made a sorry figure beside the splendidly built frame of Charles Nelson.

The gentleman thief could, no doubt, have thrown Wharton down the steps of any arm, had he wished. Nelson gazed with an unwavering glance into the eyes which the other bent upon him.

"Well, Mr. Wharton, I am Charles Nelson. What have you to say to me?" he remarked finally.

For a moment Wharton lost his composure. The sight of the Gibson man seemed to infuriate him. He realized his own inferiority, irritated him to recall Nelson's manner toward Betty—a respectful manner, no doubt, but one undeniably punctuated with admiration.

Everyone waited to hear what Wharton would say. At last he spoke.

"I only wanted to say," he replied, "that I have no wish to continue this charge. You have been very decent about returning the money, and it is only fair to be decent in return."

"Thank you," said Nelson, with the greatest politeness. "That is most kind and considerate of you. But what about your wife? If I understand correctly, she possesses different views on that subject from your own."

"My wife has nothing at all to do with the matter," quickly retorted Wharton. "But she arrested me," answered Nelson, with a pronounced smile of amusement at the recollection, "and she has some right to be angry with me."

"Not at all," replied Wharton, turning to the captain.

The latter stood directly in front of Wharton. He had been watching him intently from the moment he entered the room.

Wharton's face had turned red when Nelson insisted that Betty should have something to say about it. Whether he should go to jail or not.

"It was my money he stole," continued Wharton. "It wasn't hers. She had nothing to do with it. I would like to decide what's to be done."

The captain had seated himself. He still watched Wharton with an intense interest. Wharton began to believe that he had impressed him favorably.

"It was my money," he repeated, with emphasis on the "my."

"I'm on," said the captain, giving Nelson a sidelong glance.

Instantly the prisoner was on his feet. His face became tense. Every muscle in his body seemed taut. With evident emotion, but without a tremor in his voice, he declared:

"I am the guilty man, captain."

Wharton smiled as he heard Nelson's words.

"You hear, captain? He acknowledges his guilt," he said.

"That's nothing," replied the captain. "He has never done anything else but acknowledge it since he arrived here."

"And I want you to know that I am just generous enough to want to let him off," continued Wharton, with a wide sweep of his hand and an impressive squaring of his shoulders.

"But we won't take advantage of your generosity," answered the captain, who had been looking from Betty to Nelson and then back again at Wharton.

"Wharton must have taken his guard," cried Wharton, completely taken off his guard.

His face was a study. He had never expected such a reply to his offer.

"I mean just this," continued the captain. "I agree with Mrs. Wharton in the matter. Since you have taken your own hands off the money, suppose I talk to you instead of to her."

Wharton's eyes and added in a hard, gruff voice about which there could be no misunderstanding, "either you must press this charge against Nelson or you must go to jail!"

"Wharton, I will give you just one minute to make up your mind as to what you want to do. You can choose between two alternatives. Either you must press this charge against Nelson or you must go to jail!"

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